

Communities



Emerson Elementary School teacher Gary Evans helps out students (from left) Emmy Cornwell, Gary Gasper, Chris Martinez, Skylar McAlvey and Kelly Moore, who meet every Wednesday to use ham radios. The Herald/JIM LEO

Snohomish students get a taste of ham radio

By **CLAIRE TUOHY-MORGAN**
Herald Writer

They're hamming it up at Snohomish's Emerson Elementary School, but with a serious end in mind.

The Amateur Radio Club, 10 Emerson students who have their amateur radio licenses, meet before school in teacher Gary Evans' classroom to learn about the fun and the uses of ham radio.

They practice proper procedures, monitor the airwaves, communicate via "packet" (radio and computer) and drill with the Snohomish School District's emergency network.

Evans, a ham radio operator, started the club in October with a \$500 grant from the American Radio Relay League. He saw it as a way to enhance social studies, language, writing, math and science lessons, and to introduce students to a different technology.

One recent morning, Emmy Cornwell, Chris Martinez, Kelly Moore, Kyle Ceruti, Ben Jensen, Skylar McAlvey and Gary Gasper communicated with their "packet pals" at Gold Bar Elementary School, and talked to each other on walkie-talkies.

The club hopes to connect with ham stations, and maybe have

packet pals, in each state the students will cover in social studies. They're also researching the possibility of obtaining equipment for global communication.

The students participated in a January districtwide emergency drill to test the equipment's use as a temporary emergency communications system. Also checking in were individual radio operators at Machias Elementary School, Centennial Middle School, Snohomish High School and an emergency ham network.

The drill demonstrated that amateur radios at each school can communicate effectively and solicit needed help if normal communication lines are disrupted, Evans said.

District business and operations director Michael Schroeder said he is always looking for ways to improve communications, and the drill went well. The district planned to have another drill this week.

The students earned their ham licenses following a December weekend course and tests.

The club has had help from established hams, including retired Snohomish High School teacher Joe Clayton, a longtime ham radio operator. He has hosted them at his "ham shack,"

and talked to them on the air. A Bellevue company, ICOM, lent equipment and donated a power supply while the group waited for the grant money, Evans said.

The students know the rules: no swearing, no music, no "cranking up" the power and no business talk.

Several students bring their radios to school almost daily, and practice short-range communication on the playground until Evans is sure of their on-air manners, procedure and protocol.

"Ham radio is an adult world, not just a bunch of kids dinking around with walkie-talkies," he said.

Skylar McAlvey's father, Mark, donated a radio that students can take turns taking home. While monitoring one weekend, Evans heard student Gary Gasper conversing with another ham, and was pleased with Gary's on-air maturity.

"I stress with the kids ham radio is very much service oriented, standing by and providing communication in an emergency," Evans said. "It's very fun, but there are some very serious aspects of it. They have really shown a great deal of maturity and confidence in doing this."